

Washington, D.C. - Today, U.S. Representative Melissa Bean joined a bipartisan coalition including U.S. Representatives Bart Stupak (D-MI), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Vern Ehlers (R-MI), Rahm Emanuel (D-IL), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Dale Kildee (D-MI), Mark Steven Kirk (R-IL), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and other Members of Congress representing Great Lakes states to introduce the Great Lakes Oil and Gas Drilling Ban that would prohibit oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes. There are currently five such wells in Lake Michigan, which borders Bean's district.

"Lake Michigan is the primary source of fresh drinking water for residents of Illinois' Eighth District," Bean said, "so the cleanliness of Lake Michigan is one of my highest priorities. Given the continued and growing demand on the Great Lakes as a resource for drinking water, commerce, and recreation, it is essential that we protect them from irreversible damage and dangerous contamination. A permanent ban on new drilling will help do that."

The effects of drilling, which range from harmful byproducts to chemical accumulation in the food chain, can have substantial undesirable effects on the Lakes' overall water quality. Between 1973 and 2001, there has been an average of 135 oil spills per year in the U.S. Great Lakes, ranging from 11 gallons to 179,912 gallons.

For the past 30 years, state and local governments in Great Lakes states have worked with their own citizens and the federal government to reverse years of damage to the Great Lakes. They have made tremendous progress, improving the quality of the Lakes while encouraging commerce and the economic vitality of the region.

In 1985, eight Great Lakes governors signed a "statement of principle against oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes." This was a non-binding agreement and only has the force of law if the states instituted statutes in response. But, as the leaders of individual states change, their policies may change as well. Some Great Lakes states have enacted permanent bans on providing new oil and gas drilling permits in state waters while other states have no bans.

Congress first enacted a temporary ban on Great Lakes drilling in 2001. Congress extended the temporary ban in 2003 and then recently extended it again through 2007. However, a permanent ban does not exist.

The Great Lakes represent 95 percent of the United States' surface freshwater and provide drinking water for more than 30 million Americans.

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